

## Advance care planning.....talk early, talk often

Advance care planning requires people to talk about things we generally try to avoid...talking about getting older, becoming dependant on others, getting sick and frail and, in many cases, talking about dying. Few people are comfortable talking about these things, and often put off the conversation because it is too hard or too emotional.

**TIP:** Be very clear to your family / friends that this conversation is important. It can help if you make it clear why you want to talk about these topics with those close to you. For example, "I've been worried / thinking about some things and I'd like to talk about them"

If you are ready to begin these discussions, here are some suggestions that might help you get started

### Starting the conversation:

- Choose a suitable place and time. No one finds it easy to talk when they're rushed or in a stressful situation. There is no 'right' time to have these discussions there is only a 'right now' moment.
- It can be helpful if there is an obvious prompt to open the discussion. For example a newspaper article or television shows where someone is hospitalised or dying. You can then use this as a conversation opening 'I would / wouldn't want that to happen to me.'
- Start the conversation with someone you feel comfortable with and who you think will be OK with talking about your wishes
- Explain why you want to talk about this now. Be as honest and personal as possible from the start
- If it doesn't work the first time, try again a day or two later. Sometimes you may have to wait a week or two. Be persistent.

### During the conversation

- Try to make sure that you say what you want to say. Don't get distracted or play down your concerns if your family makes a fuss
- Use humour and have a bit of fun with the discussion. It's a serious topic, but it doesn't have to be done seriously
- Expect that people will get emotional. This is an opportunity to talk about the things that really matter
- You may want to reassure the person you are talking with that you are doing this to sort things out early, to be sure that everyone knows what YOUR wishes are; it doesn't mean that something bad is going to happen to you tomorrow
- Talking about who would be a good decision maker for you if you were unable to speak for yourself is often a good place to start. This can then lead to the types of decisions that they may have to make in the future

**TIP:** You may need to have lots of ‘small’ advance care planning conversations rather than one big ‘Let’s get everything done’ conversation. The reason to start talking about things while you are well is to help prepare your family for a time when you are seriously ill and /or unable to speak for yourself.

## Subjects you might want to think about discussing with the people close to you

Knowing what to talk about can be very difficult. Listed below are some of the areas that people often leave it too late to discuss

- The type/s of long term health problems that you have and how they affect you on a daily basis
- How you feel about going into hospital and your experiences with medical treatment
- Worries or thoughts that you have about being ill or dependant on other people
- How you make medical treatment choices for yourself
- Who should be involved in making decisions for you if you are unable to make them for yourself
- Your personal views on what quality of life means to you and what you think would be ‘the worst’ way for you to be alive
- Organ donation
- Your personal thoughts on dying
- The type of care that you would like to receive when your time for natural dying comes (for example high tech, medical focussed care or comfort based supportive care ; medical treatments aimed at delaying dying or medical treatments aimed at reducing distressing symptoms of illness)
- How you define ‘comfort’
- Whether you have any spiritual care preferences
- The environment you would like to be cared in when your time for dying comes (for example would you like to be in a home like environment, or in a hospital; would you like music playing; would you like family / friends around you)
- Funeral arrangements

**TIP:** Talking with your family / friends about your wishes for care if you are seriously ill or approaching your end of life is a loving gift to them. It helps to ease the burden of decision making if they know what your own choices are. If you really cannot talk to your family about how you would like to be cared for, try writing your wishes down and giving the letter to someone you trust will give it to your family when it is needed.